



Representative Jim Buck

24th District



Serving Clallam • Jefferson • and Grays Harbor counties

February 2005

Olympia Office:

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
360-786-7916

E-mail:

buck.jim@leg.wa.gov

Rep. Buck's legislative homepage:

<http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/buck.htm>

Committees:

- Natural Resources, Ecology and Parks
Ranking Republican Member
- Transportation

Resources on the Internet:

Access.wa.gov – Provides access to state agency services, including applying for unemployment benefits, renewing your car tabs, and much more.

Leg.wa.gov – Offers committee meeting schedules and nearly everything else you want to know about the Legislature.

SBA.gov and WSBDC.org – Sites that provide help in starting or operating a small business.

Dear Friends,

The 59th Washington Legislature convened its scheduled 105-day session Jan. 10, with many new faces, a lingering controversy over the gubernatorial election, and a \$1.8 billion budget deficit hanging like a cloud over the state Capitol.

The budget deficit will certainly dominate much of our attention. Despite the tax-increase budget proposed by outgoing Gov. Gary Locke, we believe that it's not only possible but imperative that we forge a general fund budget **without tax hikes**. Partisan battles and hot rhetoric won't get the job done, but with discipline, focus, and the courage to act, we have every expectation that we can shape a spending plan that ensures government lives within its means and provides the services citizens have a right to expect.

Although Republicans are in the minority in the House and Senate, we are not sitting idly on the sidelines. We have advanced a positive policy agenda that focuses on energizing the state's economy, creating new job opportunities, protecting access to health care, and providing top-caliber education opportunities for our children. Election reform, the Hood Canal Bridge graving yard and other transportation issues also figure prominently in the Legislature's work during the months ahead.

If you have questions or other concerns to share with me, please call, send an e-mail or write a letter. I am always glad to hear from you, and welcome your comments and ideas.

Thank you for the honor of serving you in Olympia.

Sincerely,

Jim Buck
State Representative



2005 Legislative Report



Rep. Jim Buck • *Serving the 24th District*

Hood Canal Bridge graving yard gets legislative scrutiny

Disappointment, confusion, anger and shock were among the emotions expressed by local elected officials, legislators, business leaders, union workers and private citizens following the Dec. 21 decision by the state Department of Transportation (DOT) to abandon the Hood Canal Bridge graving dock project on the Port Angeles waterfront. The 22.5 acre construction yard was to be used to build pontoons and anchors for the eastern half of the Hood Canal Bridge, considered the transportation "lifeline" between the Olympic and Kitsap peninsulas.

The department announced the pullout in response to a request from the Lower Elwha Klallams that the state leave the site where the village of Tse-whit-zen once stood. At this point we do not know how many more yet-undiscovered skeletal remains, tools and artifacts may be found.

We are, of course, sensitive to tribal concerns for the ancestral remains, and we respect the cultural significance of what archaeologists believe is the oldest and most extensive Indian village ever discovered in the Northwest. But we cannot simply walk away from such a considerable expenditure of taxpayer dollars.



In January, all three 24th District lawmakers called for a legislative investigation of the decision to abandon the yard. The state has invested over \$58 million on the bridge-replacement project, which is now expected to cost \$283.5 million, about \$100 million more than projected before work at the graving yard was halted. Combined with local economic losses to Clallam and Jefferson counties, there are clear and compelling reasons to keep working toward a solution – even if that means situating the graving yard at another location.

An investigation by the Legislature into why and how the project was suspended would not only provide accountability for taxpayer dollars, but in the event that compromise and resumption of construction at the current site is not possible – and the bridge fabrication work has to be relocated – legislative muscle would help us keep the project on the North Olympic Peninsula.

This is doubly important because in addition to the replacement and retrofit work slated for the Hood Canal Bridge and Seattle's Evergreen Point Bridge, a locally based graving yard operation has the potential of generating new jobs and other significant economic benefits to the Peninsula well into the future.

For example, a Federal Way company has developed a new modular hybrid pier intended to be repair-free for 100 years. Faced with the prospect of having to repair or upgrade about 500 of its piers and wharves, the U.S. Navy is currently testing the pre-cast, lightweight concrete structures. If the technology proves out, construction would begin in 2007. The Peninsula's geographic advantages combined with a permanent graving-yard location would position the facility to compete strongly for this innovative project.

Revitalizing the economy and bringing new jobs to our community

In addition to crafting a responsible budget – **without tax hikes** – the key to putting Washington on the road to economic recovery is changing the current business climate to one that not only attracts new companies, but encourages existing firms to expand and hire additional employees. We need to get people back on the payroll, taking care of their families and contributing to the economic strength of our communities and state.

It's going to take disciplined budget-writing, leadership and political courage to accomplish what's required to recharge Washington's economy. Through the years, our caucus has fought hard against higher taxes, increased spending and government bureaucracy that hurt employers, hold back job creation, and slow the state's economic pulse beat.

We cannot afford to lose opportunities to attract new companies and good family-wage jobs to our district and our state, and I will continue to make business investment and restoring our area's economic vitality one of my top priorities.

2005 Legislative Calendar

- Monday, Jan. 10** – First day of session
- Wednesday, March 2** – The 52nd day of session, and deadline for bills to be passed out of committees
- Monday, March 7** – Deadline for bills to clear House fiscal committees
- Wednesday, March 16** – Deadline for House passage of bills originating in the House
- Friday, April 1** – Deadline for passage of Senate bills by House committees
- Monday, April 4** – Deadline to pass Senate bills out of fiscal committees
- Friday, April 15** – Deadline to pass all bills out of both House and Senate chambers (5 p.m.)
- Sunday, April 24** – The 105th day of the session. Legislature adjourns (sine die)

2005 Legislative Report



Now serving his sixth term representing the 24th District, Jim has a well-earned reputation among legislative colleagues for his hard work, integrity and principled leadership.

Buck named top Republican on key House panel

Rep. Buck returns to a familiar leadership role this year with his appointment as ranking Republican on the new House Natural Resources, Ecology and Parks Committee. The panel combines policy areas previously considered by the former Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and the former Fisheries, Ecology and Parks Committee.

The new panel will consider a wide range of legislation including forestry practices, wildlife management and public parks. Members will also take up irrigation and other water-related issues – policy areas formerly assigned to the old Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

“Jim is one of the Legislature’s most knowledgeable and trusted voices on natural-resource issues. He brings insight, expertise and experience to his role as the committee’s ranking member, plus a solid record of bridging partisan differences,” said House Republican Leader Bruce Chandler.

Buck served as chairman and later co-chairman of the former Natural Resources Committee, authored the 1996 Salmon Recovery Act, and was the guiding force behind the 1999 “Forests and Fish” timber agreement.

Election reform

In the wake of the missteps, mistakes and discrepancies that have left serious questions about the reliability of the outcome of the gubernatorial race, Secretary of State Sam Reed proposed an executive request package of major election reforms. Among the proposals the Legislature is considering:

- Moving the date of the state’s primary from September to June.
- Requiring that absentee ballots be returned by Election Day.
- Requiring election workers to notify, in writing, voters whose ballot signatures are missing or questionable.
- Banning political operatives from collecting affidavits from absentee and provisional voters whose ballots were previously rejected because of signature problems.
- Giving all counties the option of conducting elections entirely by mail.



An election mired in discrepancies erodes voter confidence

There is no question that the 2004 gubernatorial election will be remembered not only as the closest race in state history, but one in which procedural missteps, clerical mistakes, counting errors, lost ballots and other voting discrepancies tainted the outcome, eroded public confidence in the election process, and left many of us with the unsettling conclusion that we really don’t know who won – and we never will.

In addition to the discovery of more ballots than the number of voters registered, there were cases where people were credited with voting although they died before absentee ballots were mailed. There was also evidence that provisional ballots were counted without verification, and because of a clerical error, some ballots were mailed too late for servicemen and women stationed overseas to vote.



Public-opinion polls by KIRO TV and KING TV in January revealed strong support for a revote. Both surveys asked: “Should there be a revote in the race for Washington’s governor?” KING poll respondents favored a revote by a margin of 69 percent to 30 percent. The KIRO survey had nearly 16,000 respondents favoring a revote by a margin of 76 percent to 23 percent.

On Jan. 11, legislative Republicans moved to delay certification of the gubernatorial election results, but the majority party rejected the motion and ratified the election.



Rep. Jim Buck • *Serving the 24th District*

***Making
Your Voice
Heard in
Olympia!***

Jim Buck State Representative

(360) 786-7916

E-mail: buck.jim@leg.wa.gov

Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000

TTY (Hearing-impaired Hotline): 1-800-635-9993

Legislative information on the Internet: www.leg.wa.gov

Making health care more accessible and affordable

The medical insurance crisis in Washington is getting worse every day. Out-of-control jury awards and skyrocketing premiums have created one of the state's most critical public-policy issues. Jury awards for pain and suffering can be staggering, and are driving malpractice insurance costs through the roof. Insurers have abandoned whole business sectors and doctors are scaling back their practices, retiring early, or leaving Washington to practice in other states.

The Association of Washington Cities reported that Washington taxpayers picked up the tab for \$80 million in 2001 for verdicts and settlements for errors and negligence by state workers or contractors. Without setting common-sense limits on jury awards, the hit on taxpayers will continue to grow.

The effort to control unrestrained judgments – commonly known as tort reform – would set a cap on damages for pain and suffering, but would not limit economic damages. A similar limit was adopted in California in 1975. Since then, growth in malpractice insurance costs in that state has slowed dramatically.



Medical malpractice initiatives

Two medical malpractice initiatives have been submitted to the Legislature, one backed by the Washington Medical Association (**I-330**), and a second proposed by the Washington State Trial Lawyers Association (**I-336**).

Among its provisions, Initiative 330 would impose a cap on non-economic damages and limit lawyers' share of damage settlements.

Initiative 336 would revoke the licenses of doctors who have three jury verdicts against them in 10 years for preventable medical injuries, and ban secret settlements in medical malpractice cases.

In all likelihood neither measure will pass the Legislature this session, meaning both will go directly to the voters on the statewide ballot next November.

2005 Legislative Report

Olympia, Washington 98504-0600
P.O. Box 40600

Jim Buck
Representative



PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing